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Relationship of the Parenting Styles of Overstressed Mothers with the Anxiety of their Children

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between parenting styles of overstressed mothers with their children's anxiety. A total of 250 elementary school children and their mothers participated. First, the mothers were screened using the Parenting Stress Index (PSI, 1990). Based on the screening, 80 overstressed mothers were selected and completed a parenting Styles Inventory (Baumrind, 1973). In addition, their children with an average age of 10 years and 6 months completed the Reynold's Children Anxiety Questionnaire (1982). Multiple regression analysis revealed that an authoritarian parenting style was negatively related to children's anxiety. Furthermore, over stress of mothers and one component of it, social isolation, positively related to children's anxiety. In addition, one of the other components of over stress in mothers, role limitation, negatively related to children's anxiety ($P < 0/05$).

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1. Introduction

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent and serious forms of psychopathology in children (Feng, Shaw, & Silk, 2008). A review of the literature provides evidence for an association between family factors and child anxiety. However, the exact nature of such an association is far from clear (Bogels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006). Two of the most important family factors that are related to child anxiety has been shown to be parental skills (Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003) and high levels of stress on the part of parents, especially mothers (Crawford & Manas, 2001). There is strong and consistent evidence that parenting behaviour affects the development and maintenance of anxiety in children (Ballash, Leyfer, Buckley, & Woodruff-Borden, 2006). Parental acceptance and control have frequently been conceptually grouped together in the literature (Wood et al., 2003) and, together with autonomy and over protectiveness, are the main components of parental rearing. Controlling parents have been found to encourage child dependence (Wood et al., 2003). That contributes to high levels of anxiety via cognitive biases in terms of perceiving events as being out of one's control (Chorpita &

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Barlow, 1998). Rapee (1997) reviewed the literature on parental acceptance and control, and suggested that there is consistent evidence that child's anxiety is related to perceived parental rejection and control. Furthermore, maternal overprotection and reinforcement of avoidant behavioural strategies has been shown to lead to increased fear and inhibited behaviour in children. Parental control/autonomy has also been found to have a moderate to strong relationship with childhood anxiety in several studies (Whaley, Pinto, & Sigman, 1999; Deman, 1986). Baumrind (1991) classified parenting skills in two dimensions - responsiveness and demandingness, and based on these, introduced three parenting styles: authoritarian parenting style which in parents are grueling, and demanding, whereas their response to the child's needs is minimum; indulgent parenting style in which the parent's limitations are at a minimum and their responsiveness is at a maximum. Such parents are non-demanding, non-controlling and relatively warm; authoritative parenting style which, in terms of responsiveness and demandingness are high, while control and what is demanded are in balance. Links between high parenting stress and concurrent problems in children and parent functioning have been demonstrated, and there is recent evidence of the negative effects of cumulative stress on children's behaviour (Davis & Carter, 2008). For example, Crnic & Hoffman (2005) found that both stressful life events and daily parenting hassles predict a negative affect and problem behaviours in children. Researchers have indicated that the prevalence of anxiety disorders in the children of overstressed parents is approximately twice that of non-stressed parents. Kaitz and Maytal (2005) showed that the children of such parents are at risk of developmental anxiety disorders and the disturbance of parent-child interactions. McClure, Brennan, Hammen & Le Brocque (2001) replicated earlier studies' findings of the elevated rates of anxiety disorders among the offspring of overstressed and anxious mothers. Furthermore, the parental style of stressed parents is over-protectiveness or no response (Hirshfeld, Biederman, Faraone & Rosenbaum, 1997) and they are less warm and less positive in their interactions with their children, less granting of autonomy, and more critical and catastrophizing. Van Gastel, Legerstee and Ferdinand, (2009) found that maternal current anxiety diagnoses were significantly associated with child anxiety diagnoses. Also maternal 'overprotection' was significantly but negatively associated with child anxiety. According to what has been expressed, the hypotheses of the present study are: (1) there is significant relationship between mothers' parenting styles and children's anxiety. (2) There is significant relation between mothers' over stress and children's anxiety.

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

Four hundred mothers of female 4th and 5th graders of a primary school selected from 22 districts of Tehran using a multilayered random-selection method were invited to take part in the session at school. Two hundred and fifty mothers volunteered, and the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) (Abidin, 1995) was distributed among them. Only 200 questionnaires were fully completed. Based on the PSI, 80 mothers were categorized as overstressed. All of them completed the parenting skills inventory (Baumrind, 1971). Moreover, all the daughters (with a mean age of 10.6 years) completed the Reynold's children anxiety questionnaire (Reynolds & Paget, 1983). Upon completing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed verbally regarding the aims of the study.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Parenting Stress Index (PSI)

The PSI is used for the early identification of dysfunctional parent-child interactions, parental stress, family functioning, and risk of child abuse and neglect, and is used to evaluate child custody decisions. The PSI consists of a 120-item test booklet with an optional 19-item life stress scale and an all-in-one self-scoring answer sheet/profile form. It yields 17 scores, including 7 child domain scores, 8 parent domain scores, and a total stress score, plus the optional life stress score. The internal consistency coefficient of the tool was determined in a group of American (Solis & Abidin, 1991) and Iranian mothers; for the total scale 93%, 86% and 94%, 89% for the child domain and 83% for the parent domain, respectively (Dadsetsan, Azghandi, & Hassanabadi, 2007).

2.2.2. Parenting Skills Inventory

This questionnaire evaluates parenting skills (including indulgent, authoritarian and authoritative methods of parenting) and consists of 30 statements. Buri (1991) used the pre test-post test method to determine its reliability, and the results were 81% for indulgent parenting, 86% for authoritarian, and 78% authoritative parenting. He also evaluated internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha, with results of 75%, 85% and 82% for indulgent, authoritarian and authoritative parenting, respectively.

2.2.3. Revised children's manifest anxiety scale (RCMAS; Reynolds & Paget, 1982)

This questionnaire relates to general anxiety, and assesses manifest anxiety in the 6-19 age range. Reynolds & Paget (1983) found three anxiety factors by factors analysis on RCMAS: somatic factor, worriness factor, hyper-sensitivity and a concentration factor. In a study by Dadsetan, Janbozorgi and Noori (2001), the Cronbach's Alfa in Iranian children was 83%.

3. Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for parenting styles of overstressed mothers and anxiety of children.

Levels	Central tendency measures			Variability measures		Distribution measures			
	Mod	Median	Mean	Range	Variance	Sd.*	Se.**	Skewness	Kurtosis
Competency	25	25.00	25.85	18	23.01	4.79	.55	.16	-.73
Parental attachment	11	15.00	15.15	17	16.45	4.05	.46	.10	-.40
Role limitation	17	14.50	14/13	17	15.95	33.99	.45	-.80	-.70
Depression	19	19.00	18.21	16	13.23	3.63	.41	-.013	-.46
Relation with spouse	31	32.50	33.33	21	24.78	4.98	.57	.23	-.19
Social isolation	25	26.50	25.31	23	32.80	5.72	.67	-.7	0.85
Health of parents	38	36.00	35.33	27	58.31	7.63	.87	.17	.80
Lifetime stress	16	17.50	17.47	17	15.61	3.95	.45	.9	.50
Mothers' Stress	153	154/00	153.13	208	957.07	30.93	.54	-2/91	.86
Indulgent parenting	29	27.00	27.10	24	21.37	4.62	.53	.20	.18
Authoritarian Parenting	33	27.00	27.18	33	37.91	6.15	.70	.25	.78
Authoritative Parenting	36	27.00	29.84	30	69.20	8.31	.95	-.25	.11
Anxiety	26	26	25.50	44	106.92	34	.18	-.17	-.22

*Sd. = Standard deviation, **Se. = Standard error

An inspection of Table 1 reveals that the mean, the median and the mode of the measured variables are close to one another. In addition, the value of skewness and kurtosis are below one, indicating that the distribution assumes normality. Consequently, parametric statistics were used to analyse the data.

Table 2. Multiple regression analyses: parenting styles of mothers predicting children's anxiety

Source	Ss	Df	Ms	F value	P <
Regression	836.16	3	72.278	2.79	.046
Residual	7182.83	72	99.76		
Criterion variable	Predicted variables	B	B	t value	P <
Anxiety	Indulgent	.33	.14	1.24	.217
	Authoritarian	-.15	-.77	-.77	.440
	Authoritative	-.40	-2.48	-2.84	.006

Table 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between parenting styles. The coefficients of regression demonstrate that an authoritative parenting style is negatively related to children's anxiety and predicts it. Consequently, an authoritative parenting style decreases children's anxiety.

Table 3. Multiple regression analyses: overstress of mothers predicting children's anxiety

Source	Ss	Df	Ms	F value	P<
Regression	1375.63	1	1375.63	15.32	.001
Residual	6643.36	74	89.77		
Continued					
Continued					
Criterion variable	Predicted variables	B	B	t value	P<
Anxiety	Overstress	.13	.41	3.91	.001

Table3 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between the overstress of mothers and children's anxiety. This indicates that the overstress of mothers predicts anxiety in children. Consequently, the overstress of mothers increases children's anxiety.

Table 4. Multiple regression analyses: parenting styles of mothers predicting children's anxiety

Source	Ss	Df	Ms	F value	P<
Regression	272.95	8	340.62	4.31	.001
Residual	5294.8043	67	79.01		
Criterion variable	Predicted variables	B	B	t value	P<
Anxiety	Competency	-.13	.14	1.24	.217
	parental attachment	-.14	-.77	-.77	.440
	Role limitation	.06	-2.48	-2.84	.006
	Depression	.01	.01	.03	.969
	Relationship with spouse	-.32	-.15	-1.38	.172
	Social isolation	1.03	.57	3.98	.001
	Health of parents	.05	.03	.30	.762
	Lifetime stress	.21	.08	.65	.514

Table 4 shows that there is a significant relationship between the components of overstress of mothers and children's anxiety. The coefficients of regression indicate that social isolation is positively related to children's anxiety and predicts it. Consequently, the social isolation of mothers increases children's anxiety.

4. Discussion

In the present study, in order to investigate the relationship between the parenting styles of overstressed mothers and children's anxiety, a multiple regression analysis test was used. The results show that there is a significant relationship between the parenting styles of mothers and children's anxiety. It is revealed that an authoritarian parenting style has a negative relationship with children's anxiety. In other words, children who belong to mothers that use an authoritarian parenting style would experience less anxiety (Table 2). This result is inconsistent with several studies (Ballash et al., 2006; Chorpita & Barlow, 1998; Rapee, 1997; Whaley et al., 1999). For an explanation of these results we can refer to Heaven & Ciarrochi (2006). They believe that since authoritative parents are supportive and deal with their children warmly and with acceptance, their children are better adjusted. In addition, Desjadins, Zelenski & Coplan (2008) believe that children with authoritative parents compared with those of other types, have better social and emotional behaviour (Solis & Abidin, 1991). In brief, it could be argued that authoritative parents provide more intimacy, acceptance and friendly behaviour, and give more autonomy and responsibility to their children. They also avoid using rejection, excessive control, criticism, blame, punishment and over protection. As a result, they provide security and safety for their children and prevent them becoming insecure, stressed and worried. It also leads to a greater sense of responsibility, ability to solve problems, stability, and improved connectivity and social skills. All of this makes for greater self-esteem and decreased anxiety. As we can see from Table (3), there is a positive significant relationship between overstressed mothers and children's anxiety. Overstressed mothers have more anxious children. Among

overstressed mothers it is revealed that the social isolation of mothers has the greatest impact on children's anxiety. In fact, mothers who avoid social contact have more anxious children. These results are inconsistent with the results of many other researchers (Crawford & Manas, 2001; Whaley et al., 1999; Davise & Carter, 2008; Hirshfeld et al., 1997). In addition, overstressed mothers, regardless of their own stress, were less warm towards their children and also granted them less autonomy and more catastrophisation. These mothers created a stressful environment for their children due to these behaviours, making them feel unsafe, fearful, worried, incompetent and having no controlling over events. It is suggested that in future, more studies should focus on the father's parenting styles and their outcomes on children.

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